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An
Inaugural Dissertation
on
The treatment of Mania a Potu

by
The Spider's Web

by
Ric^d Sexton of Delaware.

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The Spiders Web

On
Mania a Potu

induced by
Spiders Web

Diseases in which the brain becomes a suffering part, and as a consequence its appendages the nervous system, form a class more ^{mortal} and untractable, than any other division of Nosology. The various fevers of the typhoid type, apoplexy, epilepsy, &c. occupy a most disproportionate part of the bills of mortality, and to treat them with any success, the physician must call into action his utmost judgment and attention.

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Mania à potu, is a species of this class, which is very frequent in this country. It is that disease which so often ends the career of the habitual drunkard, and those are the persons most obnoxious to the complaint. In its nature it is very unmanageable, and the situation of the patient is such, as a medical man would pronounce extremely unfavourable for the operation of remedial articles: the combination of mental hallucinations springing from a morbid condition of the brain, with the extreme irritability of the nervous system, accompanied by an invincible vigilance, weakness & quivering of the pulse, and debility of the stomach, being the pathognomonic distinguishment of the disease, very similar in the description to that of the last stages of other disorders.

The muscular power of the patient most commonly, however, being comparatively little reduced, gives a basis for the hope, that he is not in reality so low as he appears; yet now and then we find the debility so great, as to prevent rising from the bed, and in such a case the most pressing

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The aim of all treatment in this complaint, is to overcome the morbid vigilance, which, if it does not cause many of the distressing symptoms, at least so encourages them, as to render them invincible, untill it be removed. Sleep indeed in this disease is a sine qua non, and the difficulty with which it is induced, is the most remarkable circumstance attending it.

There are three methods of treating mania à potu in use at the present time, each of which has numerous votaries, but perhaps the Stimulant plan, or the 1st of our divisions is the most followed, and attended in the end with the least dubious success. Whatever mode, however, may be employed, it is generally but as a preparatory measure for the administration of opium, and if the other remedies only prepare the system for the full action of this, the end desired is obtained, for on its full effect we may place the most certain expectations of relief.

The stimulant plan of treatment which I have

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mentioned, consists in the administration of the patient's customary draught, or of some of the more volatile stimulants as the Carb. Ammoniac or Ether. The mere stimulus of the alcoholic liquors, often proves sufficient to restore the patient, particularly if the disease be not far advanced, or if it originate entirely from the cessation of drinking in the habitual drunkard; but sometimes the stomach will refuse the remedy by itself, and then a few drops of Laudanum may be mixed with the spirits, which combination the stomach perhaps will bear. The application of cold water to the head is also often found beneficial, particularly if the patient in a recumbent situation where he may sleep. In one case I placed the patient's head under the spout of a pump, and caused a stream of water to fall on it for 10 or 12 minutes, and then wiping it dry, I made him lie down in bed, & in a few minutes I had the pleasure to see him fall into a sound sleep from which he awoke, relieved. In this case, it appears to me, the cold operated in the same manner as a dose of opium, by its sedative influence.

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The second method of treating mania à potu is by emetics. This practice originated with L^d Boissier of the city of Philadelphia, who reports many cases successfully treated in this manner in one of the numbers of the Medical Recorder. I never saw a case managed in this way, and therefore can form no positive opinion relative to it: but that it is successful under particular circumstances, we have every reason to believe.

Dr Chapman, whose opinion on any subject connected with medicine is common authority, delivered himself to this amount in his Clinical lecture at the Sims house on the 19th November — "After the action of an emetic slack is often induced, or at least the sensibility of the system to the impression of remedial agents is removed, so that sleep may be procured by a quantity of opium comparatively small, with what it would have required in the previous state of heightened susceptibility. Emetics, however are contra-indicated in the greatest number of cases. There must be present a certain firmness of constitution, before

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They should be prescribed; first, then, be administered to a patient much debilitated they would produce an exhaustion from which the system already on the verge of sinking would never recover."

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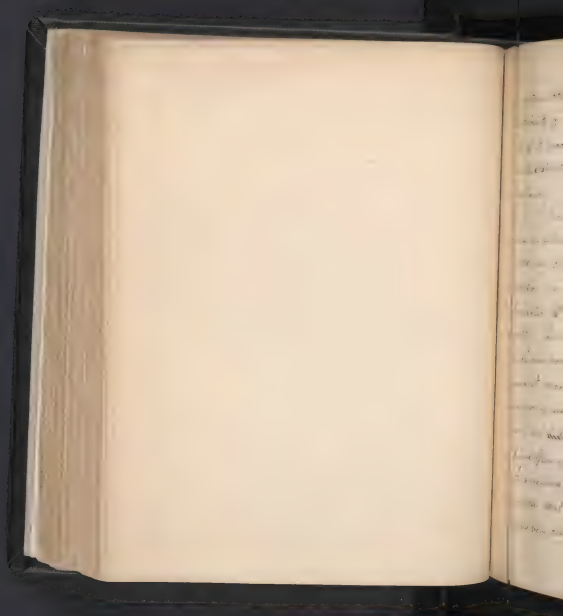
a stage of severe though imperfect ex-tense & follows
that of effusion: and these different characters of the
disease, is modified by peculiarity of constitution. should
always be borne in mind for they require constant
variation in the treatment. In debilitated and tubercular
subjects, for instance. I am much inclined to think
effusion is one of the earliest: and though not a permanent
one, it that point is fatal. In robust subjects, ex-tension
is an advanced stage. In the former, a constitution
that have not been subject to tubercular disease, is
less known early and extended ex-tension from
stagnation, when followed by active effusion. In a young
man I formerly treated that tubercular disease, was
one in this disease; but as I had imbibed this opinion
from having witnessed its progress, efforts in the
early stage, had been unavailing. By now knowing this
I have been fruitful in the treatment of numerous cases. Yet
I am fully persuaded that there are not many instances
where the disease is really, curable. * of the nature

* Anthon on effusion vol. 2. p. 104.



of freedom I have nothing to suggest except, that where
freedom is more extensive in the United States, and
in some States, I think is confined to subjects of im-
mense, and most imperfect; and as being his favorite
cause, and as it is very common, and natural policy,
is further to be supported, and the influence of others
will multiply. In the States of the South, that have
freedom, I think I have experienced the most acute
contamination of conscience, but I know an owner of
black property, who, for religious reasons, has sold
his three hundred slaves, and I have yet to know
of this without too clearly knowing a price can exist.

The policy of the abolition is, to the extent
of which, in the States, this may want to be done,
is not a new introduction. Some persons are, it was spoken
as a new and ardent, for the cause of a new and just; but it
was in all other rejected and was practiced within three
or four years. It was not the cause of a new and liberty



for intermittent fever, and for diseases where there is much
variability of the nervous system; in the latter instance the ex-
tent of its good effects is large but the cause is doubtful.
That variability, however, but in a great number of circumstances.

I have been so accustomed to use the Spiders web, &
consequently a settled practice, but suppose every physician I
could in cases of excessive nervous irritability & of a hectic dis-
position and whether it is in a convulsive or in a thermic
character & have rarely been ~~unsuccessful~~, aided in the
result. In one case of consumption, pleurisy, pneumonia,
which was very quick in its progress and termination, I
found it most strikingly beneficial, in alleviating the cough
and giving rest to the patient, and though with Bell's Lique,
I can not ~~but~~ ^{but} think that life was prolonged in the disease.

I have often used it in intermittent fever, sometimes however
with a negative result, yet often enough to suggest, to some
minds, that it deserves a prominent rank among the remedies
in this very common disease.



The next difficulty with regard to the Linder
case that is experienced was the almost impossibility of
collecting a sufficient quantity of the feed once for any experi-
ments. The doves are from pure to heavily grained, yet it
is a large seed that contains few grains. There can be
found old seeds in buildings which mixed with dust and
other extraneous matter will weigh less than 12 grains, but I
never made account of them connecting any of the powers of the
food. In one case of intermittent, I was able to secure

this kind of seed, taken from a nest containing fresh eggs, in
a year but this time since it has been put in, without any apparent
effect, but a few times it was the same quantity of 12 grains
of the seed, but, however the larvae grew. Then one, it is noted
was observed as coming in the middle of the season, which under
the disease is an early sign of disturbance, but this I could not
discover any evidence to confirm.

In the month of June 1855, three more persons
were confined at the gaol at the Castle, American, and
were from the American - Chesapeake Canal. These persons

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were all taken away from some three to others - and then
to give them stimulants & injections in the groin - in four
or five days symptoms of the disease began to be
sensible among them. At first four were affected, and
within ten days, one was recovered. They were all treated
in the Stimulant method, by the exhibition of brandy and
Opium: four of them recovered & one died. One of them
who was taken in for a severe disease without previous notice,
but still was induced, by purging and water on his head
as regular actions. On the day that one of them died another
became a patient who had been apparently well before
& owing as I suppose to the storm, produced by the death
of his companion. He was immediately to be at once
affected, as those who had run through the disease four days
in the complaint. He recovered however on the 14th or 15th day
but in continued motion about the 20th, in which
he was confined, as it seemed at times to be in the utmost
distress. Death was given him the next day & followed
at night by three grains of Opium. Thus had no effect



on him as not answering, he rose on his feet, & remained about
 in the same way. A Powder was given him on the next day,
 and it was determined at night to try the effect of the Linnaea
 root, which has been found to succeed in cases of con-
 vulsive action. Accordingly, I administered hourly grains
 of the article in one dose at 7 o'clock in the evening. It
 was in the form of pills made up with a few grains of
 Asafetida, in which manner I was accustomed to ex-
 hibit it. The next morning the state of my patient was
 extremely improved; he was sitting up, his mind had ceased
 to wander, and he complained ^{entire} of flatulency at the stomach, and
 very great debility. One of his companions who remained
 with him through the night, informed me that about two
 hours after he had been in bed, he sat down on
 a chair, and leaning his back to his head, caught me of
 a pain in it. From that situation, after remaining in it some
 time, he returned to his bed, and slept, afterwards got
 up, and continued in that state until morning. Tea
 and water & nourishing diet was all that was afterwards

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required for the establishment of the health of the patient.

In this case there was the most unequivocal evidence of the favourable operation of the ^{Salutaris} ~~Salutaris~~ nothing else was to be done to cause the resolution of the disease so suddenly and I never heard that it is one of those which spontaneously disappear. That case in which I connected it was not so distinctly defined. In this patient I was called on the 24th September. He was also a labouring man from the canal, and who had been sent away for medical treatment. He was occasionally incoercible, but about two weeks before I saw him a fever of the remittent type ^{had} attacked him, a prominent symptom of which was a very great irritability of the stomach which prevented him from eating or drinking any thing but water. The fever subsided in five days, and in course of the thirteen next nothing was the result of his stomach remained. Immediately after this change of his disease, symptoms of mania a potius supervened and continued with him more or less violent, according as his stomach would

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near the summit of the mountain, where the day was clear and

When I first saw the patient it was in the evening and he lay on the left slope of a grassy hill of low ground, feet according to his own account seven feet. His pulse was fine and beat 105 strokes per minute. He had not seen him in the afternoon. I could not attribute his recovery to any cause as it was incredible, but I considered the fever as his chief ailment, and as he was recovering, ordered him a little calomel & calomel & quinine. The next morning however, I found the patient much worse. He immediately became delirious freely and plainly to his disadvantage. The symptoms were changed also to those, which never can be mistaken as ~~any~~ ^{any} other could not have been so much as put.

Two more times, the change of the mind, the work of a day, with a cold, diarrhoea of the skin, and also all the symptoms of a violent fever, and then a few years later, when I was known to have been in the room. The delirium was so great as almost to prevent him from seeing from

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the fact. As I remember the patient in the next case said
 once I was worse & dying, the effect of the medicine did
 not prevent death & I was in large doses. The practice was con-
 tinued for three days to the patient gained strength but became
 more & more weak. During this time he was not distressed by
 sleep although he never perceived him at times to a sleep, in-
 stable on the morning of the 23rd day, I administered 23 grs
 of the Tincture in his dose with him, he was not well before
 his death. This increase of strength with the most dis-
 tinguished patient took both doses and a few days after
 taking the second dose, he fell into a sound sleep, which
 lasted 3 hours, and he awoke from his confused and
 delirious.

But in relating the effects of a single powder
 to another patient, I can find no instance of cure.
 It seems however strange that well known as were the houses
 in which persons resided, no instance of disease was
 attributed to this particular disease. Another patient who
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worthy of notice, shall confirm what I have advanced relating to it. I know not; but of this I am certain, that whatever humility may be attached to the experiments I have made, I shall always be proud of the principles which caused me to make them.

1794
The first of the year was a
very cold one, and the
winter was very severe.
The snow lay on the ground
for many weeks, and the
frost was very hard.

